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ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that underrepresentation of blacks in professional nursing results from insufficient black-nurse role models. This study of 331 black and white freshman nursing students in three, two year, associate degree programs argues that blacks are not professional nurses for reasons other than a lack of role models. The results show that the black and white students differ little in regard to values and orientation toward nursing. The socio-economic variation between the black and white students appears to account for the small variation observed. Discrimination by schools of nursing is suggested as the major barrier to blacks becoming registered nurses. (Author)

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IS NURSING A VIABLE CAREER FOR BLACKS?*
(A STUDY OF BLACK AND WHITE FRESHMAN NURSING STUDENTS)

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ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that underrepresentation of blacks in professional nursing results from insufficient black-nurse role models. This study of 331 black and white freshman nursing students in three, two year, associate degree programs argues that blacks are not professional nurses for reasons other than a lack of role models. The results show that the black and white students differ little in regards to values and orientation toward nursing. The socio-economic variation between the black and white students appears to account for the small variation observed. Discrimination by schools of nursing is suggested as the major barrier to blacks becoming registered nurses.

It has been predicted that the supply of registered nurses in the Unites States will soon be critically inadequate. (Lysaught, 1970) Nursing educators have declared that effective patient care is in jeopardy without additional sources of nursing manpower. Blacks, as well as other minority groups, are considered ideal for recruitment into nursing. (Lysaught, 1970:137) It appears, however, that blacks have been systematically excluded from professional nursing careers by discriminatory practices and economic and educational deprivation. Although the presence of a number of predominatly black schools of nursing[1] alleviates to some extent the vast underrepresentation of black registered nurses, their numbers remain few.[2]

There is a scarcity of data about blacks in nursing. The few studies in this area point out discriminatory practices, (Morais, 1969; Staupers, 1961; Shananhan,

1961) need for increased recruitment, (Applewhite, 1971) and the necessity to integrate black and white schools of nursing. (Carnegie, 1964) Little data exist, moreover, concerning the attitudes and orientation of blacks toward nursing as either a profession or a career. In one recent study, Winder, (1971) drawing upon the responses of 32 black high school girls, concludes that blacks do not chose careers as nurses because they lack black role models. That is, blacks do not perceive professional nursing as a viable career because of the scarcity of blacks in the profession. Winder's conclusion contradicts earlier studies and appears to have racist overtones because, as Ravitz (1955:295-296) contends in his study of nursing integration:

> To explain this lack of Negro students in nursing school as indicative of Negroes' disinterest in nursing cannot realistically be tolerated. The presence of Negro students in non-restricting hospitals and the existence of numerous Negro girls, who, with adequate physical and scholastic attainment, sought to enter but were refused admittance to training school underscores the inadequacy of such an interpretation.

It is certainly questionable to conclude that black women require black role models to decide upon a career in nursing. This line of thinking presupposes that blacks have some decisive cultural end distinct from or even opposed to, that of whites. But is this statement accurate? Don't black men and women identify with many of the same values as white men and women and, hence, rely upon many white role models? Material possessions enjoyed by whites surely represents a goal, directly and indirectly, toward which blacks generally aspire. Goldschmid (1970:19) also questions blacks' need for black role models. He contends that "...many black people incorporate negative views of their own subculture and identify with white middle-class standards... particularly upward mobile Negroes..." Historically, blacks have had

little alternative but to identify with whites. What remained of their black heritage and self respect after a hundred years of slavery? The white man if only for his social position, represents, a person worth emulating. (Loewen, 1971:45-48)

If blacks are to be attracted to careers as registered nurses, their attitudes and orientation toward nursing must be more fully understood, especially if there are significant differences. If, as the literature suggests, blacks identify closely with and have many of the same values and attitudes of whites, then the two races should express a similar perception of nursing. It is the intent of this study to compare the attitudes and values of black and white nursing students.

Population and Method

A sample of 331 freshman nursing school students[3] selected from three state supported schools of nursing,[4] located in the mid-South, and offering associate degrees in nursing were surveyed during the first week of orientation at each school. None of the students had any didactic nursing education as a professional nurse.

One of the schools studied, where the 112 freshman students were black, is part of a predominantly black university and is located in an urban center. The two other schools of nursing studied had a total freshman enrollment of 219 white students and are connected with predominantly white college; one of the white schools is located in the same city as the black school of nursing while the other is situated in a rural locale about 40 miles away. The rural, white school of nursing is part of a community college and the urban white and black schools are associated with two different local branches of the state university system. Although the black freshman students at the white schools of nursing were surveyed with their classmates, their small number precluded using them in this study.

By and large, the black and white freshman nursing students chose their respective

school of nursing for the same reasons but stressed these differently. While the blacks made their decision primarily on the basis of their perception of the quality of the school (29 percent) or its convenience or location (28 percent), whites mentioned most frequently the school's convenience or location (45 percent). (See Table I) It is significant that convenience or location played such a major role in the students' decision, particularly the white students. Apparently, these state supported schools of nursing provide through their particular location educational opportunities to many students who would not otherwise have attempted a career in nursing.

The white and black nursing students showed significant differences in regard to a number of demographic variables. The median age of the white students was 21 years compared to 19 years for the black students. Whereas the black students tended to make their decision to enter nurse training almost immediately following high school graduation, the freshmen in the white school of nursing tended to delay their decision until they were significantly older. The age differential between the white and black students is also reflected in the amount of job experience each group has had in a medical setting. Slightly over 60 percent of all the students had some medical experience as a licenced practical nurse, nurses' aid, volunteer, etc.. The black student nurses, however, had significantly less medical experience than their white counterparts, with 41 and 71 percent, respectively. Since the white students were older on the average, it was not unexpected that 38 percent of them were maried compared to only 17 percent for the black students. Almost twice the proportion of the black (5 percent) and white (4 percent) students were divorced, separated, or widowed. Male representation was higher among the black students with 17 percent compared to 9 percent for the white students. The white students' family income, averaging $10,000, was also substantially higher than the $7,000 averaged for black students' families. (See Table II)

No significant differences were found between the two groups for a number of other denographic variables. The majority of the students in both groups were from the same southern state where these schools of nursing are located (71 and 74 percent of the black and white students, respectively). All but 15 percent of the students in both groups were Protestant with the remainder being primarily Catholic. Slightly over 60 percent of the blacks' fathers or husbands (for those who were married) were employed in blue collar occupations. This figure compares to approximately 50 percent for the whites. About one-fifth of the students from both races were from professional families.

The two groups of students pay for their college education in different ways. Considering the fact that the blacks have significantly lower family incomes, it was expected that they would have a higher proportion of scholarships than the whites. Whereas black students had a higher proportion of partial scholarships than white students, 19 and 13 percent, respectively, black students had more full scholarships than white students with 3 and 10 percent, respectively. Instead of having scholarships, the black students had loans (25 percent of the blacks compared to 15 percent of the whites indicated having borrowed money to pay for their education). The large majority of students in both groups did, however, pay for their education themselves. (See Table III) This similarity in total scholarships between whites and blacks (23 percent vs. 22 percent) suggests that the separate educational systems are not equal, particularly if "need" represents the major criterion for giving scholarships. The black students appear to be discriminated against because, considering their low economic status, they have received a smaller proportion of scholarships than they should.

The two groups of freshman students were compared on the basis of their responses to a series of 26 variables. These variables were categorized under four major headings: (1) decision to become a nurse, (2) relationship of nursing to other

professions, (3) knowledge of and perception about the nature of the nursing profession, and (4) future career orientation. (See Table IV)

Findings

With only four exceptions, no significant differences were found between the black and white freshman nursing students for the 26 variables studied. Both groups of students indicated encouragement from relatives and friends to enter nursing, spending little or no time in hospitals as patients or visitors, and considering nursing their first choice as a career. Nursing was believed similar to teaching and social work for prestige, authority, responsibility, and orders taken. Nurses were, however, perceived as helping people more than the other professions. Regarding nursing itself, the students agreed that nurses had satisfactory authority, responsibility, and working hours, and that nursing provides adequate opportunities to express one's ideas and imagination. The extent to which nurses are forced to take orders was also believed satisfactory according to both groups of students. Nursing was also viewed as having high prestige yet interfered somewhat with one's personal life. Helping others and menial jobs were indicated as the most and the least satisfactory aspects, respectively. Finally, the majority indicated a preference for full-time employment in a hospital, considered their own career in nursing very important, and expected to continue their education beyond their two year nursing program.

The four differences between the groups were as follows. First, the black and white students decided upon a career in nursing for varying reasons. The white students chose nursing as a career because they either enjoyed people (23 percent), perceived nursing as a very gratifying, useful and rewarding career (21 percent, or had prior experiences working in the medical milieu (21 percent). The black students, on the other hand, chose nursing primarily because they enjoyed people (34 percent). To a lesser extent, the black students' decision was based upon nursing representing

to them a gratifying, useful and rewarding career (13 percent), or the pleasure of previous work experience in a medical setting (13 percent). (See Table V).

Second, the black students were significantly more likely than the white students to believe the salary received by nurses is excellent. Approximately 45 percent of the black students compared to only 31 percent of the white students said that nurses' salary was excellent. Conversely, equal proportions in each group--40 percent--said that the salary of nurses was unsatisfactory. The remainder of the respondents in each group, 15 percent of the blacks and 30 percent of the whites, remarked that nurses' salary were just "all right." (See Table VI)

Third, the black students were more likely than the white students to consider nursing salaries higher than the salaries of teachers and social workers. Almost twice the percentage of blacks as whites (46 percent vs. 26 percent) said that nurses received higher salaries. The white students, however, perceived the salaries of nurses to be about the same (43 percent) or less than those of teachers and social workers (32 percent). (See Table VII)

Finally, differences in perception of the length of nursing training were observed between the two groups of students. Whereas almost one-fifth of the black students contended that nurse training was "too long" only four percent of the white students remarked similarly. The opposite relationship emerged, however, when the students were asked if the length of nurse training was "too short"; as 16 percent of the white students and 8 percent of the black students said that the training period was, in fact, "too short." With these differences, it was also found that the majority of students in each group, 74 and 80 percent of the blacks and whites, respectively, believed that the length of nurse training was "all right." (See Table VIII)

Summary and Implications

The data reported in this article indicated that racial differences between nursing

students appear to have little over-all effect upon their attitudes and opinions about nursing. On all but four of the 26 variables examined, the black and white freshman nursing students responded similarly. Only for (1) reasons given for wanting to become a nurse, (2) perceived salary levels of nurses, (3) perception of comparative salary levels, and (4) length of nursing training did the two groups differ significantly.

The demographic variation in the two populations helps explain the observed differences. Considering the fact that the black students are from families with lower economic means than the white students, it is not unexpected that they emphasized the economic advantages of nursing as well as a shorter training period. Doubtlessly, there is no other profession with as short a training period and as high an income as a registered nurse from an associate degree program. Both teaching and social work, for example, require four years of college and then the comparative starting salaries are not better, if not less, than that of nursing.[5] In addition, job opportunities in nursing are substantially greater than in teaching and somewhat better than in social work.

The observed relationship between race and perceived length of nursing training also appears related to the economic differential between the black and white students. Considering the economic strain imposed upon a frail income to finance college education, black students, with fewer scholarships and more loans than white students, might easily perceive a two year program as "too long." Since the white students possess greater economic resources and as a result, lack the same economic imperatives as the black students, they are not as inclined to evaluate nursing training as "too long."

The linkage of blacks to nursing for economic mobility is not totally supported from the students' responses to why they decided to become nurses. Social mobility does not appear as major a consideration in the black students' decision as the other data suggest. Both groups of students perceive nursing within the Florence Nightingale

image of helping. Although the black students indicated a substantial knowledge of the economic advantages of nursing, they apparently did not enter nursing training for primarily economic reasons.

The lack of blacks in nursing has led to speculation that nursing does not represent the same type of calling to blacks as it does to whites. In this study we have attempted to show that black and white nursing students have essentially the same basic orientation toward nursing. However, even if Winder's (1971) contention that there are few blacks in nursing (relative to their proportion of the population) because there are insufficient black-nurse role models and, because of this scarcity of black-nurse role models, few blacks decide on nursing as a viable career was supported by the facts, there are logical objections to a theory which attempts to "blame the victim" for his victimization. Winder's type of analysis has the ultimate, although unintentional, effect of distracting attention from the basic causes and leaving the primary social injustice untouched. And, most telling, the proposed remedy for the problem is, of course, to work on the victim himself. Prescriptions for cure... are invariably conceived to revamp and revise the victim, never to change the surrounding circumstances." (Ryan, 1971:24) In other words, the lack of blacks in nursing is more accurately associated with discrimination in admissions to professional schools of nursing which according, to Davitz (1955) and Applewhite (1971), have kept down the numbers of blacks in nursing.

The question remains, however, as to how the barriers to admission of blacks to schools of nursing can be broken down and thus allow additional blacks into professional nursing. The profession, per se, does not appear to require alteration in its image since it apparently represents a viable profession to blacks now. Changes, however, must be intitiated in recruitment policies and training practices in order to provide additional opportunities for blacks to matriculate in nursing schools. If nursing educators maintain that blacks value professional nursing less than whites, and thus blacks are to blame for their under-representation, black representation in nursing

will not increase. The blame for the lack of blacks in nursing must be properly placed upon the schools of nursing with their discriminatory policies. Not only must blacks be admitted to schools of nursing in increased numbers but they also must be graduated and assisted in passing state licensure and obtaining suitable placement.

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Footnotes

1
These include Tuskages Institute, Freedman's Hospital, Grady Hospital, Dillard University, Harlem Hospital, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College, Provident Hospital, Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina, Lincoln Hospital, Kate Bitting Reynolds Hospital, Winston-Salem College, Prairie View College, Hampton Institute, and Tennessee State University.

2
At present there are approximately 20,000 black practicing registered nurses constituting about 3 percent of the total number of practicing registered nurses in the United States. (Facts About Nursing, 1950-1971)

3
The respondents in this sample had already made the decision to become registered nurses and had taken the first step toward actualizing this decision by enrolling in a certified, two year associate degree program. Although this study will not differentiate between blacks and whites choosing (or not choosing) a career in nursing, generalization can still be gleaned from analyzing students who have made such a decision.

4
The three schools of nursing studied were founded between 1966 and 1968.

5
Starting salaries for registered nurses from an associate degree program in an urban area near the three schools of nursing range from $8400 to $9000 compared to $6800 to $7200 for teachers and $6000 to $7800 for social workers. These figures suggest that the black students are more aware of the salary differentials between teachers, social workers, and nurses than the white students. Liebow (1967) also notes that blacks have a firm grasp of the economic realities of life.

TABLE I

WHY SELECTED SCHOOL OF NURSING BY RACE OF NURSING STUDENTS

Why Selected School of Nursing	Race of Nursing Students			
	Black		White	
	#	%	#	%
Quality of School (e.g., good/best school, highly recommended)	44	29.3	54	16.6
Aspects of Program (e.g., good curriculum, length of program)	22	14.7	60	18.4
Facilities of School	5	3.3	4	1.2
Convenience or Location of School	42	28.0	147	45.0
Personal Considerations (e.g., Family ties, friends go/went there)	16	10.7	23	7.1
Financial Consideration (e.g., inexpensive, received financial aid)	21	14.0	38	11.7
Total[1]	150	100.0	326	100.0

$x^2 = 21.0$, 5df, $p < .001$

[1] Some respondents gave more than a single response.

TABLE II

SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS BY RACE
OF NURSING STUDENTS

Demographic Characteristics	Race of Student Nurses			
	Black		White	
	#	%	#	%
Age				
18-19	62	57.4	75	35.4
20-21	18	16.7	46	21.7
22-23	12	11.1	13	6.1
24 +	16	14.8	78	36.8
Total[1]	108	100.0	212	100.0
	$x^2 = 23.1$, 3df $p < .001$			
Sex				
Female	92	82.9	199	91.3
Male	19	17.1	19	8.7
Total[1]	111	100.0	218	100.0
	$x^2 = 5.1$, 1df $p < .05$			
Martial Status				
Single	87	77.7	116	53.0
Married	19	17.0	84	38.4
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	6	5.3	19	8.6
Total[1]	112	100.0	219	100.0
	$x^2 = 19.4$, 2df $p < .001$			
Family Income				
Less than $5000	28	26.9	25	12.0
$5000-$9999	49	47.1	73	35.1
$10,000 or more	27	26.0	110	52.9
Total[1]	104	100.0	208	100.0
	$x^2 = 23.1$, 2df $p < .001$			

[1] Totals vary as some data was incomplete.

TABLE III

METHOD USED BY NURSING STUDENTS TO PAY FOR COLLEGE
BY RACE

Method Used to Pay for College	Race of Nursing Students			
	Black		White	
	#	%	#	%
Full Scholarship	3	2.7	22	10.3
Partial Scholarship[1]	21	18.8	27	12.7
Paying Own Way[2]	60	53.5	133	62.4
Loan	28	25.0	31	14.6
Total	112	100.0	213	100.0

$x^2 = 12.8$, 3df $p < .01$

1 Out of these persons with partial scholarships, 8 (38.1%) of the black students and 16 (59.3%) of the white students also had loans.

2 This category includes both self-support and parental-support.

TABLE IV

TWENTY-EIGHT VARIABLES ANALYZED BY CATEGORY FOR THE STUDENT NURSES[1]

I. Decision to Become a Nurse:

a. Who encouraged to become nurse.
b. What influenced to become nurse.
c. Amount of time spent in hospital as patient or visitor.
d. Length of nursing training.
e. Sequence of career choices.

II. Relationship of Nursing to Other Professions:

a. Prestige of nursing compared to teaching and social work.
b. Orders taken by nurses compared to teachers and social workers.
c. Authority of nurses compared to teachers and social workers.
d. Responsibility of nurses compared to teachers and social workers.
e. Salary level of nurses compared to teachers and social workers.
f. Nurses' ability to help people compared to teachers and social workers.

III. Knowledge of and Perception About the Nature of the Nurse Profession:

a. Amount of authority nurses have on the job.
b. Extent of orders taken by nreses.
c. Opportunities for nurses to express their own ideas and imagination.
d. Nursing offers good working hours.
e. Nursing offers opportunity to be own boss.
f. Amount of responsibility of nurses.
g. Salary received by nurses.
h. Most satisfying job of nurse.
i. Least satisfying job of nurse.
j. People look up to nurses.

IV. Future Career Orientation:

a. What type of nurse plan to become.
b. Committment to job.
c. Importance of having own career.
d. Expectation to continue education beyond degree.

[1] Order of questions is not necessarily the same one on the survey instrument.

TABLE V

PERCEPTION OF NURSES' SALARIES AND RACE OF NURSING STUDENTS

Perception of Nurses' Salaries	Race of Student Nurses			
	Black		White	
	#	%	#	%
Excellent	51	45.0	66	30.6
All Right	17	15.7	64	29.6
Unsatisfactory	44	39.3	86	39.8
Total	112	100.0	216	100.0

$\chi^2 = 10.9$, 2df $p < .01$

TABLE VI

PERCEPTION OF SALARY RECEIVED BY SOCIAL WORKERS AND TEACHERS TO NURSES' SALARIES AND RACE OF NURSING STUDENTS

Perception of Salaries Received by Nurses	Race of Student Nurses			
	Black		White	
	#	%	#	%
Higher Than Teachers and Social Workers	51	46.4	55	25.7
The Same as Teachers and Social Workers	30	27.3	91	42.5
Lower Than Teachers and Social Workers	29	26.3	68	31.8
Total	110	100.00	214	100.0

$x^2 = 14.7$, 2df $p < .01$

TABLE VII

PERCEPTION OF LENGTH OF NURSING TRAINING
AND RACE OF NURSING STUDENTS

Perception of Length of Nursing Training	Race of Student Nurses			
	Black		White	
	#	%	#	%
Too Long	20	17.9	8	3.7
About Right	83	74.1	174	80.1
Too Short	9	8.0	35	16.1
Total	112	100.0	217	100.0

$x^2 = 21.4$, 2df $p < .001$

TABLE VIII

WHAT INFLUENCED NURSING STUDENTS MOST TO BECOME NURSES AND RACE OF STUDENTS

What Influenced Students Most to Become Nurses	Race of Student Nurses			
	Black		White	
	#	%	#	%
Enjoy People	42	34.2	56	23.0
Previous Experience	16	13.0	52	21.3
Gratifying Job, Useful and Rewarding Career	16	13.0	50	20.5
Relatives, friends	11	8.9	16	6.6
Wanted Medical Career	10	8.1	28	11.5
Shortage of Nurses	12	9.8	11	4.5
Pay	3	2.4	12	4.8
Nothing; own decision	13	10.6	19	7.8
Total[1]	123	100.0	244	100.0

$x^2 = 16.49$, 7df $p < .05$

[1] Some students gave more than one response.